
OLR Bill Analysis

SHB 6358 (as amended by House "A" and "B")*

AN ACT UNLEASHING INNOVATION IN CONNECTICUT SCHOOLS.

SUMMARY:

This bill:

1. permits high school students to earn academic credits using non-traditional, mastery-based standards based on guidelines established by the State Board of Education (SBE);
2. establishes an eight-member task force to study education mandate relief for high-performing school districts;
3. eliminates an annual interdistrict meeting requirement related to the Open Choice attendance program; and
4. requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to (a) study issues relating to local partnerships for advancing the teaching profession and (b) submit the results to the Education Committee by June 30, 2015.

*House Amendment "A" (1) requires SBE to adopt guidelines for competency and performance standards that students can use to earn mastery-based academic credits and (2) maintains the current requirement that Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) provide SDE an annual count of available Open Choice seats in their districts by April 15.

*House Amendment "B" adds the provision establishing the task force to study education mandate relief for high-performing school districts.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2013, except the task force and local

partnerships study provisions are effective upon passage.

MASTERY-BASED ACADEMIC CREDITS

The bill permits an additional, non-traditional method for high school students to earn academic credits towards graduation by demonstrating mastery based on competency and performance standards, in accordance with guidelines adopted by SBE. By law, a student may already earn non-traditional credit by completing coursework (1) at a Connecticut public institution of higher education or (2) online, in accordance with local or regional board of education policy.

TASK FORCE TO STUDY MANDATE RELIEF

Duties

The task force must study education mandate relief for high-performing school districts, including (1) reviewing mandates in the state statutes and regulations and recommending which ones may be waived for high-performing districts and (2) exploring ways in which such districts can work with SDE to relieve other administrative mandates. In doing so, it may consult with the governor's Red Tape Review and Removal Task Force.

The bill defines a "high performing school district" as one that is among the:

1. 15 school districts with the highest absolute district performance index (DPI) for the 2012-13 school year (see BACKGROUND);
2. five school districts with the greatest rate of progress in DPI during the school years 2010-11 through 2012-13; or
3. five school districts with the greatest decrease in the achievement gap for students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, as measured by the DPI for such students during the school years 2010-11 through 2012-13.

Membership

Task force members are appointed by legislative leaders as follows:

1. two each by the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore and one each by the House and Senate majority and Senate minority leaders, each of whom may be a legislator and
2. one superintendent of a high-performing school district, appointed by the House minority leader.

Appointing authorities must make their appointments within 30 days of the bill's passage and fill any vacancies. The House speaker and Senate president pro tempore must select the chairpersons from among the members. The chairpersons must schedule the first meeting within 60 days of the bill's passage.

Report and Termination

The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Education Committee by October 1, 2013. It terminates on the date it submits the report or on October 1, 2013, whichever is later.

OPEN CHOICE INTERDISTRICT ATTENDANCE PROGRAM

The bill eliminates a requirement related to the Open Choice interdistrict attendance program, which, under current law, aims to (1) improve academic achievement; (2) reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation; and (3) provide a choice of educational programs for public school students. The bill removes the requirement that each RESC organize an annual meeting of school district representatives, by March 31, to receive their count of available spaces for out-of-district students for the upcoming school year. It retains the requirement under current law that RESCs provide an annual count of these open spaces, by April 15, to SDE, but allows them to collect the numbers by any means they choose.

BACKGROUND

DPI

A school district's DPI is its students' weighted performance on the statewide mastery tests in (1) reading, writing, and mathematics in grades three through eight and 10, and (2) science in grades five, eight, and 10. The index is calculated by:

1. weighting student scores in each of these subjects as follows: zero for below basic (the lowest score), 25% for basic, 50% for proficient, 75% for goal, and 100% for advanced;
2. adding the weighted student scores for each subject;
3. multiplying the aggregate student results in each subject by 30% for mathematics, reading, and writing and 10% for science; and
4. adding the weighted subject scores.

The weightings produce the lowest indexes for districts with the lowest test scores.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 26 Nay 0 (03/28/2013)